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DEPT PLS PASS TO CDC AND HHS

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [KFLU](#) [TBIO](#) [EAGR](#) [PGOV](#) [KHIV](#) [CASC](#) [IN](#)

SUBJECT: AI IN WEST BENGAL - SITREP 6, JANUARY 19-21

REF: KOLKATA 23 AND PREVIOUS

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¶1. (U) Summary: Avian Influenza continues to spread through the West Bengal. Over the January 19-21 weekend, the presence of H5N1 was confirmed in the Bankura and Malda districts of West Bengal, bringing the total number of affected districts to seven in less than one week. The seven affected districts now include: South Dinajpur, Murshidabad, Birbhum, Nadia, Bardwan, Malda and Bankura. Poultry deaths have also been reported from Darjeeling and Cooch Behar. These are northern districts of West Bengal -- Darjeeling is situated adjacent to Nepal and Sikkim and Cooch Behar borders Assam and Bhutan. Both districts also border the already AI-affected Bangladesh. South of Kolkata, there are reports of poultry deaths in North and South 24 Parganas districts. No human cases have been reported yet. Five people are under observation with clinical symptoms of bird flu. All five are from Murshidabad district and had handled infected birds. Test results are due January 22. Culling teams continue to face resistance from villagers concerned about compensation, and culling in some districts is not moving as fast as needed. Consulate Kolkata is responding by informing the local AmCit community and following crisis management tripwires. End Summary.

¶2. (U) From January 18-20, Econ FSN visited the Birbhum, Murshidabad, S. Dinajpur and Malda districts. The situation in ¶S. Dinajpur, where H5N1 was reported on a state owned farm, appeared under control with 3000 chickens culled. Family members of farm staff were evacuated and placed under surveillance. In contrast, GWOB officials were experiencing greater problems in Birbhum and the districts of Bardhaman, Murshidabad, Bankura, and Malda. In these districts the farms are spread over a wide area, and poultry operations are informal, backyard operations. Often there are only 8-10 birds in any one house, and birds move freely into neighboring households. GOWB authorities have to go house to house in this large area to identify and cull birds, slowing the process considerably.

¶3. (U) Econ FSN found in the rural districts that the threat of AI was not being clearly explained to residents. Culling teams told people, without clear explanation as to why, that they had to turn over their birds. As a result, the villagers remain suspicious and resistant to the culling operations. The issue has also been politicized. Village elections are scheduled in ¶W. Bengal for May, and some local leaders are reluctant to assist ARD officials for fear of being seen as complicit in the culling operations. Also, ARD culling teams have only been providing villagers receipts for culled birds to file claims with local authorities and not cash. Many residents fear that

compensation money will go to local politicians and those who support the ruling CPM party first.

¶4. (U) Econ FSN also observed an "isolation ward" at Rampurhat Subdivisional Hospital in Birbhum district. The hospital is about 30 minutes' drive from Margram, the epicenter of the outbreak. The isolation ward is a separate room in the hospital with four beds, draped in non-sterile green linen. The hospital does not have ventilators (these have been requested from New Delhi) or adequate equipment to treat seriously ill victims.

¶5. (U) The GOWB continues to lack sufficient manpower to address the outbreak. GOWB officials indicated that the number of culling teams will increase to 500. Right now there are less than 100. Personnel from the Assam Animal Resources Department and from other states have arrived to join the GOWB teams. The GOWB has placed orders for 50,000 more personal protection kits from 3M, a U.S.-based company.

(U) On January 21, Pol Chief attended an emergency meeting organized by UNICEF in Kolkata. The GOWB approached UNICEF to help increase public awareness about AI and to conduct informational campaigns in W. Bengal. UNICEF has released television, radio, and print ads about the threat of AI, proper hygiene practices, and how to report suspicious bird deaths. Representatives from the German Consulate, the Finnish Honorary Consul, and UNICEF partners received a brief presentation on AI and the current situation in W. Bengal from UNICEF'S AI team leader. UNICEF asked all present for additional resources to help the information campaign effort, including funds to cover printing costs.

¶8. In response to the AI outbreak, Post issued a Department-approved warden message on January 17 to the local AmCit Community and provided similar warnings to Post staff. In addition, the following measures have been taken:

-- January 22 Post EAC met to review mission tripwires. At

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present, Post is at the first tripwire, "Significant occurrences of AI transmitted from birds to other birds without evidence of sustained transmission to humans." Responses include:

Restrict official and unofficial travel to affected areas, bird markets and similar facilities.

b. Reinforce caution of consuming improperly cooked eggs or poultry meat and reinforce proper handling of raw poultry products. Also advise people to avoid butcher or wet markets where poultry is prepared.

c. Release warning announcement to Post personnel and warden message to AmCits.

-- On January 22, ConGen met with Animal Resource Department Secretary Dilip Chakrabarty and conveyed USG concerns regarding

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the AI outbreak (Septel).

-- Post is clearing an updated warden message reflecting the spread of AI in West Bengal with Embassy New Delhi and the Department.

-- On January 26 Post will conduct a "Town Hall" meeting with local AmCits, and representatives from local institutions, hospitals, hotels and international school. ConsCouns and RMO will provide briefing of health issues and Mission response.

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